

Marine Protected Areas Advisory Committee Issues Report

After two years of meetings, presentations and onsite visits, the Marine Protected Area (MPA) Federal Advisory Committee (FAC) issued a report containing recommendations for creating and managing a national network of MPAs that includes both existing sites and newly established ones that meet certain criteria. The FAC was established through Executive Order 13158 and is charged with providing advice and recommendations to the departments of Commerce and Interior.

According to Executive Order 13158, an MPA is “any area of the marine environment that has been reserved by federal, state, territorial, tribal or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protection for part or all of the natural and cultural resources therein.” This definition is not very different from the one developed by the World Conservation Union, which is accepted by many resource managers and scientists. MPAs have been established for various purposes, have different management characteristics, and have different levels of protection. Some may be in federal waters; others lie in state waters and some MPAs encompass both federal and state waters. Certain types of MPAs may adopt a system of marine zones, designating discrete areas within the MPA that prohibit certain types of human activities, such as fishing and waste discharge.

National marine sanctuaries, managed under the Department of Commerce’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and national parks with coastal waters, managed under the Department of Interior’s National Park Service, are considered to be MPAs. Fishery management zones, national seashores, national estuarine research reserves, national wildlife refuges, state conservation areas, and others are also classified as MPAs.

According to the FAC report, the primary goal of a national system of MPAs would be to “enhance effective stewardship, lasting protection, and sustainable use of the nation’s natural and cultural marine resources with due consideration of the interests of and implications for all who use and care about our marine environments.” To achieve this goal, the report presents a statement of purpose, outlines the benefits of a national system, sets forth guiding principals, and explains key aspects of implementation.

The 30 members of the FAC are stakeholders with diverse interests including nonfederal scientists, recreational and commercial fisheries representatives, environmental groups, and others. Members serve a two-year term. A new committee is scheduled to meet in November 2005.

For more information, visit: www.mpa.gov/.

Note: This article appeared in the Fall 2005 issue of the newsletter of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, Sounding Line. For more information, visit: <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov>.

**“MPAs are used as a management tool to protect, maintain, or restore natural and cultural resources in coastal and marine waters. They have been used effectively both nationally and internationally to conserve biodiversity, manage natural resources, protect endangered species, reduce user conflicts, provide educational and research opportunities, and enhance commercial and recreational activities.”*

**Excerpted from: Salm, R.V., J. Clark, and E. Siirila. 2000. Marine and Coastal Protected Areas: A Guide for Planners and Managers. Washington, DC: IUCN – The World Conservation Union. xxi + 371 pp.*



The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary is itself an MPA that uses zoning as a marine management tool. In 2001, the Tortugas Ecological Reserve (TER) was established as part of the sanctuary. The TER protects deepwater coral reefs that are spawning grounds for many fish and invertebrates. (Photo: John Halas)